# *Beyond the liberal-institutional paradigm: grassroots human rights and transitional justice narratives in Antígonas, tribunal de mujeres*

**Beyond the Liberal-Institutional Paradigm: Grassroots Human Rights and Transitional Justice Narratives in *Antígonas, tribunal de mujeres***

Cherilyn Elston

In the powerful last scene of the play *Antígonas, tribunal de mujeres* (Antigones: The Women's Tribunal) one of the actresses playing the titular character lists some of numerous massacres that have taken place in Colombia over the last few decades. Cleansing herself with herbs in the traditional manner of an Afro-Colombian funeral ritual, the actress's voice rises to a furious crescendo as she declares:

> I am Antigone, she who has been displaced from the cities. I come from the massacres of Bahía Portete, Macayepo, Mapiripán, San José, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, Chinú, Chinulito, El Salado, El Salado, El Salado, Puerto Bello, Puerto Clavel, Buenaventura, Buenaventura, Buenaventura, El Aro, Sopetrán, Suárez, Morales, Segovia, Segovia, Segovia, Catatumbo. (00:56:10-00:56:42).[1]

Declaring herself a "desterrada," a displaced person, in *Antígonas* Sophocles' classical heroine is refigured within the context of the Colombian conflict. Not for the first time in Colombian cultural texts, the figure of Antigone—who was condemned to death after disobeying the law to bury her brother Polynices—is deployed to mourn the dead and disappeared of the country's more than half-century war. Drawing upon a body of work that has adopted the myth to explore female resistance to conflict in Colombia, Antigone has come to represent a refusal to forget those who have been reduced to "bare life" and excluded from the polity by violence (Anrup). *Antígonas*, however, takes its engagement with those deprived of political and citizenship rights in Colombia a step beyond other dramatic engagements with the classical story. As its plural title indicates, Antigone is represented not by one actress but by all nine women who feature in the play, only three of whom are

professional actresses. Also performing in *Antígonas* are six women who have been directly victimized by violence in Colombia and who have become prominent human rights activists. As director Carlos Satizábal stated in a personal interview, the play figures these women as modern-day Antigones: "Antigone is not dead, she's alive, she lives on in these women who resist and are searching for truth."[2]

Through its engagement with women victims of the conflict, *Antígonas* has become a reference point for human rights and memory-oriented theatre work in Colombia. First staged in 2014, it can be seen as forming part of a new peacebuilding context in Colombian in which the discourses and practices of transitional justice—and its emphasis on achieving peace through balancing less retributive forms of justice with the provision of truth, memory and reparations—have become increasingly prominent. Illustrating the eruption of the memory of victims in the public sphere (Reátegui 27) and the emergence of a huge amount of symbolic and cultural memory projects in Colombia over the last few decades, *Antígonas* clearly draws upon discourses of transitional justice and the idea that art can be used to create memory and provide symbolic reparations to victims. Director Carlos Satizábal explains that it was conceived within this framework, describing the play as "an attempt to guarantee the non-repetition of these human rights violations and create historical memory" ("Memoria poética" 255).[3] Critics have consequently celebrated *Antígonas* as an example of the construction of collective memory, which provides recognition to victims of the conflict (López Plazas 44) and seeks to transform pain and trauma into individual and collective agency (Sánchez-Blake and Luna Gómez 949; Marín Pineda 102).

While building upon these insights, this chapter argues that the play's focus on memory and symbolic reparations is actually embedded in a more complex understanding of the uses of

transitional justice in Colombia, which draws upon a far more politicized human rights narrative than the language of peace, justice, and reconciliation—what Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéller refers to as a global discourse of truth and reconciliation (3)—would suggest. Reflecting the fact that Antigone is an important figure of female resistance to abusive state power in Latin America (Franco 67), the play constructs a narrative of violence that does not reconcile different actors in the conflict but focuses solely on a series of crimes committed by the Colombian state. Scenes depicting a version of Sophocles' Antigone are thus interspersed with testimonies and interactive performances of four cases of state human rights violations in Colombia: the Mothers of Soacha, whose sons were assassinated by the Colombian army; survivors of the political genocide of the left-wing political party *Unión Patriótica* (Patriotic Union); a human rights lawyer from the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective who was persecuted and spied upon by government intelligence services; and a student activist who was falsely imprisoned and accused of terrorism.

By creating a picture of human rights abuses perpetrated by the state, I argue that *Antígonas* challenges official human rights narratives of the conflict which have tried to minimize state crimes. Moreover, by weaving together a story of state abuses that occurred at the same time as the country began implementing transitional justice initiatives, the play also complicates the language of justice and reconciliation being propagated by the Colombian government, overtly exposing how Colombia has implemented a process of transitional justice without transition (Uprimny 14). In response to the exclusion of victims of state crimes from the Justice and Peace Law, *Antígonas* demonstrates how grassroots victims and activists in Colombia began to appropriate legal and transitional mechanisms to create alternative forms of justice and collective memory that come "from below." Faced with the delegitimization of their narrative of state victimization within normative legal and political structures, the

chapter shows how non-official and creative practices, such as *Antígonas*, represent "non-legalistic, non-liberal or non-state-centric initiatives" that should be included in our accounts of transitional justice (Zunino 231). Furthermore, I argue that this popular tradition of transitional justice is linked both to Colombian political theatre practices, as well as a longer human rights history in Colombia. Nuancing the work of scholars who have questioned the progressive potential of human rights, the chapter argues that *Antígonas*' narrative of state human rights abuses actually draws upon an alternative history of human rights in Colombia rooted in the radical left and projects for social transformation.

**Transitional Justice "from below"**

As the emerging interdisciplinary field of arts and peacebuilding has begun to demonstrate, in societies trying to come to terms with the legacy of conflict and gross human rights abuses there is often a proliferation of creative and artistic responses to violence (Ramírez Barat 32). Of these arts-based practices, theatre and performance have occupied a prominent role in the pursuit of truth and justice, as well as in constructing a public discourse about human rights (Becker et al. 10). This comes as no surprise, as Catherine M. Cole states, considering the dramatic affinities between the theatre and the court of law (167), as well as how "performance"—a broader category that includes theatre, dance and multiple forms of ephemeral embodied acts, such as rituals, funerals and protest actions (Taylor, "Trauma and Performance" 1677)—has been deployed in multiple contexts as part of attempts to heal trauma, contest official history and create space for community reconciliation (Cohen et al. 5). In Latin America this has been powerfully illustrated by the "public and ritualistic display of mourning and protest" of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* 186) and the celebrated Peruvian theatre collective *Yuyachkani* who collaborated with the

country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to transform public spaces into places "for ritual reflection and healing" (A'ness 399).

Echoing Jill Lane's observation that the "ontology of performance, which informs both theatrical production and courtroom trials, allows the theatre to evoke metaphorically the structural relations of a trial" (x), a play such as *Antígonas* makes explicitly clear this link between performance, theatre, and the pursuit of truth and justice in relation to human rights abuses. The play, like other examples of human rights theatre, configures the theatre itself as an imaginary human rights court. This is established in its first line, as the nine women representing Antigone file onto the stage. Directly addressing the audience, the first actress states: "Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I come here today to this tribunal to protest, to make a claim, to denounce" (00:05:15-00:05:24).[4] Her statement is followed by the other women who also declare they have come to give evidence and sets the scene for the structure of the play, which interweaves a series of personal testimonies by real victims of the conflict who present evidence and make accusations against those they hold responsible. In the first of these, Lucero Carmona describes the factual circumstances of her son's assassination by the Colombian army:

> Sir [judge], my name is Lucero Carmona. I am one of the Mothers of Soacha and the mother of Omar Leonardo Triana Carmona. He was my only son and was assassinated by the Colombian army in the village of Monteloro in the municipality of Barbosa, Antioquia, on 15th August 2007. (00:08:46-00:09:07).[5]

The verbal testimonies, where the women provide specific names, dates, and places to verify their stories, could be categorized as an example of documentary theatre, which, as Carol Martin explains, commonly involves stories based on real traumatic events and where the performers themselves are "those whose stories are being told" (9). Moreover, reflecting how

works of documentary theatre use "stage acting, film clips, photographs, and other 'documents'" as a means of providing evidence in a way comparable to a court of law (Martin 9), *Antígonas* also uses material and physical evidence, as well as intermedial devices, to testify to violence. In one scene, the mutilated doll left at the apartment of human rights lawyer Soraya Gutiérrez is displayed to the audience alongside the threats and memorandums evidencing how she was spied upon by the government intelligence agency the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (D.A.S.) and sheets at the back of the stage furthermore allow for the projection of legal documents as well as the inclusion of video testimony. For example, the student leader Mayra López Severiche holds up a sheet onto which a video is projected telling her story of being incarcerated and accused of terrorism by the Colombian state.

In providing testimony to human rights abuses in the framework of the Colombian conflict, *Antígonas* reinforces what Paul Rae describes as one of the main ways in which the theatre, which "tends to focus less on human rights per se than on their abuse", has related to human rights (qtd. in Marín Pineda 109). However, scholars have argued that the format of the testimonies delivered in the play not only shows how theatre can testify to violence but can also be used to provide restitution and restore agency to victims (Marín Pineda 102). This is enacted through the play's incorporation of what Diana Taylor refers to as the "repertoire," the embodied memory that is stored in gestures, movement, song, dance and orature ("DNA of Performance" 55). Thus, the testimonies in *Antígonas* are not just given verbally but are interspersed with moments of dance and physical movement. As Satizábal states, "the women's bodies are the basis of the live action: the female body that sings, that acts, that speaks, that falls silent, that is present" ("Conflicto y arte" 44).[6] Alongside verbal exposition then, elements of the repertoire—moments of song, gesture and dance—are combined with

objects and photographs from the personal archives of the women, which are used to aid the storytelling and importantly represent the absent victims. This is powerfully shown in the series of testimonies by the Mothers of Soacha, where the domestic items belonging to their assassinated sons are used to recover a personal history and restore the person erased in statistics of violence. María Sanabria, for example, holds up her son's running shirt, which she carefully places on the stage, before displaying cassettes of his favorite music and hairbands he collected from various girlfriends. The play's inclusion of such domestic, personal objects echoes the aesthetic practice of other prominent Colombian artists, such as Doris Salcedo. Indeed, as Lucero Carmona displays her son's favorite white shirt to the audience, which evokes the sculptures of shirts impaled with steel bars Salcedo created in response to various massacres in Colombia, the play brings to presence the invisible victims of the conflict, who would otherwise be erased from collective memory. As Satizábal states, through such reiterative performances the women "seek the poetic and symbolic restitution of the lives that have been irreparably lost" ("Memoria poética" 257).[7]

Echoing Richard Schechner's definition of performance as "twice-behaved behavior," as well as other prominent "trauma-driven performances" in Latin America (Taylor, "Trauma and Performance" 1674), *Antígonas* could thus be characterized as an embodied, interactive performance that enables women victims to transform their traumatic loss into memory, or as Satizábal explains, transform their pain into poetry (interview). In this sense then, the play is very clearly embedded in the emergence of discourses of historical memory and transitional justice in Colombia. As Michael Lazzara argues, in the midst of recent peace processes, Colombia has experienced a memory "boom" (19) in which a public discourse on victims of the conflict has been consolidated for the first time (Riaño and Uribe 11) and the Colombian state has created a series of institutional processes and mechanisms that seek to put into

practice the insights of transitional justice that a society must "come to terms with a legacy of large-scale abuses in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation" (U.N. Security Council 4).[8] Thus, a key element of transitional justice involves the inclusion of memory and truth-seeking initiatives, such as truth commissions, historical-memory projects, public apologies, and other commitments to reconciliation and non-repetition. As Lazzara states, memory discourses in Colombia have been very "much oriented towards the ideals of peace and reconciliation" (19) and a work like *Antígonas* could consequently be defined as providing symbolic reparations to victims of the conflict in line with these aims.

Alejandra Marín Pineda argues, however, that unlike the well-known examples of theatre accompanying transitional justice processes in Latin America, such as *Yuyachkani*, and despite being contemporaneous to the FARC peace talks and their creation of a series of truth-seeking mechanisms, *Antígonas* cannot be situated within an official process of transitional justice as the context in which it was made did not conform to a real situation of "transition" (110-111). Indeed, while the discourses and processes of transitional justice began to be increasingly used in Colombia from the mid 2000s—as Catalina Díaz argues, the 2005 Justice and Peace law created an alternative justice system for the demobilization of right-wing paramilitary forces and was presented by the government "as a peace process requiring new and explicit 'restorative' understandings of justice" (189)—this was paradoxically implemented within a political context in which the government of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez refused to officially recognise the existence of the armed conflict or enter into a negotiated solution with other armed groups. For critics of the Justice and Peace Law, which did not cover victims of state crimes, the government's use of the language of transitional justice did not imply the end of the conflict or deepening of democracy but was adopted merely as a rhetorical instrument (Uprimny and Saffon 176) as part of an attempt "to

absolve the paramilitary of liability for their crimes" (Rowen, *Searching for Truth* 90) and minimize "the legal, political, and economic repercussions of its [the state's] own role in fomenting" the armed conflict (Rowen, "We Don't Believe in Transitional Justice" 630).

Building upon Marín Pineda's insights, while *Antígonas* did not form part of an official transitional justice process,[9] it can be argued that the play's use of the language of law, memory and human rights is actually situated within a broader movement across Colombia where "actors from below" began to use legal and "transitional" terminology as a means of contesting the Colombian government's definition of justice and reconciliation (Díaz 199). This is seen in how the play does not simply focus on *past* human rights abuses but makes visible the ongoing violations that were occurring even as the government began increasingly using the language of truth, justice, and reconciliation. As the examples cited above illustrate, *Antígonas* mainly focuses on and denounces a series of human rights abuses—the extrajudicial executions of young men to boost the Colombian army body count, known as "false positives"; the "chuzadas" wiretapping scandal where the government intelligence agency was found to be spying on members of the judiciary and opposition political parties; and the false imprisonment of student activists on charges of "rebellion"—that were perpetrated during the Uribe presidency (2002-2010). These are included in the play through a series of didactic interventions, where the women performers explain events in detail to the audience. For example, María Sanabria describes how her son's assassination in 2008 occurred during "Uribe's term of office when there were more than 5,000 extrajudicial killings" (00:14:51-00:14:56);[10] the persecution of Soraya Gutiérrez is contextualised in the "chuzadas" spying scandal when "the [José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers'] Collective was spied upon by the D.A.S. The D.A.S. was the government's secret police and its agents gathered information about Soraya's private and public life" (00:51:34-00:51:42).[11] Likewise, Mayra

López Severiche describes how in 2005 the D.A.S. falsely imprisoned numerous student activists—"they set us up, numerous students from the public universities on the Caribbean coast"[12] (00:39:00-00:39:10)—as well as forcibly disappeared one of the students imprisoned with her.

*Antigonas* consequently deploys both legal and transitional language not only to commemorate and dignify victims but to highlight the paradoxes of the government's vision of transitional justice, which occurred "*pre*-post-conflict" (Laplante and Theidon 51) and without any clear "transition." In this way it is prime example of how alongside the creation of state-led or official memory processes in Colombia, the country has also seen the proliferation of numerous "unofficial truth projects" (Bickford 994-1035) or non-official memory initiatives over the same period, created by human rights groups, peace activists, victims of state crimes, relatives of the disappeared, and those displaced by the conflict (Reátegui 22). Importantly, a key feature of many of these grassroots truth-seeking projects has been the appropriation of normative legal and transitional justice mechanisms as means of contesting official truth-seeking and memory processes. As Kieran McEvoy and Lorna McGregor state, such projects often emerge because of "the failings of the state in question to put in place sufficiently robust transitional mechanisms to meet the relevant needs for truth, closure, healing or some form of accountability on the ground" (5).

**Alternative Human Rights Narratives**

The juxtaposition of these cases of human rights abuses in the Uribe era also points to how human rights theatre does not simply "enable legally and institutionally driven responses to human rights violations" (Becker et al. 14). Challenging the hegemonic scripts of

reconciliation and social catharsis associated with transitional justice, these theatre practices also "articulate political and human rights claims that do not align unproblematically with the grander narratives of national reconciliation or international human rights regimes" (Becker et al. 14). This point is significant in terms of the human rights narrative constructed in *Antígonas* as the play does not attempt to include victims from all armed actors in the Colombian conflict but, as we have seen, focuses solely on victims of state crimes, in a narrative that also links this to paramilitary violence and eschews any representation of guerrilla violence. Importantly, this is not just limited to the Uribe era, as the play constructs an image of the Colombian state as a perpetrator of human rights abuses over decades of conflict, and specifically goes back to violations committed during the 1980s and 1990s. *Antígonas* also includes the testimonies of two survivors of the left-wing political party, *Unión Patriótica*, whose families and loved ones were disappeared and assassinated by members of the Colombian armed forces.

The play thus makes a direct comparison between the assassination of the family of one of these survivors, Fanny Palacios, by the Colombian army in 1991—"the soldiers simulated a battle, assassinating Fanny's family and claiming they had died in combat"[13] (00:25:39-00:25:46)—and the murders of young men from Soacha in the mid-2000s who were included in the body counts of *guerrilleros* killed in combat. This representation significantly goes against official versions of the country's complex and multifaceted armed conflict, involving the Colombian state, right-wing paramilitaries, multiple left-wing insurgent groups, and drug-trafficking organizations, amongst other actors. As Iván Cepeda and Claudia Girón argue, in the official version the conflict is often represented as a confused mixture of different kinds of violence in which a weak Colombian state defends itself against guerrilla forces, paramilitary groups and drug traffickers (147). During the Uribe presidency this narrative

was taken further, as the government denied the existence of the armed conflict itself, arguing instead that the country faced "a struggle between narco-terrorists and a legitimately constituted State" (147).[14] Critiquing this official version—as Satizábal ironically states "There's no State terrorism here, this is a democratic country"[15] ("Memoria poética" 253)—*Antígonas* reinforces an alternative interpretation of the conflict that makes visible the extensive use of dirty war tactics within the framework of a formal democracy. This engages with a body of scholarly work that has analyzed the ways in which the Colombian state has perpetrated violence against the civilian population through a mixture of legal and illegal mechanisms as part of a systematic attempt to suppress social and political opposition (Giraldo; Carrillo and Kucharz; Raphael; Ramírez).

Furthermore, the play's focus on state crimes also connects it to a specific history of human rights in Colombia. In recent years, in the same way that scholars have begun to complicate the transcendent claims of transitional justice to explore how the concept works "in specific fields of political contestation" (Theidon 296) and can used by "different actors with diverging and often opposing interests" (Uprimny and Saffon 175),[16] there has emerged a body of scholarship that has sought to challenge the celebratory story of human rights as "*the* progressive international justice project" (Brown 453). This has been most influentially articulated by Samuel Moyn, whose revisionist history argues that human rights only gained precedence as a form of advocacy in the 1970s when other utopian discourses, such as armed revolution, socialism and colonial liberation began to implode. Dreams of emancipation and collective social and economic justice were thus replaced by the minimalist protection of individual rights against the state (4). Moyn's account has been replicated in other scholarly critiques, which have similarly shown how the focus on individual over collective rights chimes with the logics of neoliberalism (Speed and Sierra), as well as studies that have

questioned the efficacy of liberal human rights discourses in Colombia by analyzing how they have been used to undermine economic and social rights (Chambers). Resonating with Moyn's argument, other recent scholarship on the history of human rights in Colombia has also emphasized how the emergence of the human rights movement in the country was bound up with the retrenchment of previous ideas of collective emancipation (Gill).

To an extent, *Antígonas* appears to reinforce the limited progressive potential of human rights in protecting the individual against the state. This is represented not only in its exposition of state crimes but its representation of the failure of the Colombian legal institutions to provide redress and justice for victims. As Luz Marina Bernal states at the outset of the play, "They pass us from court to court, from one document to another, but here nothing happens" (00:06:07-00:06:12).[17] The issue of impunity for human rights abuses is Colombia is powerfully dramatized through how the professional actresses also take on the role of public prosecutors alongside their representation of the figure of Antigone. In one scene Orceny Montañez receives a new court summons to testify in the case of her partner, a UP militant who was assassinated in 1987. "Are they going to ask me the same questions I was asked twenty-seven years ago?" (00:28:00-00:28:04),[18] she queries, before being interrogated by an actress playing the Attorney General, who inquires if she still believes members of the Colombian armed forces killed her husband and then argues, using a typical defense of the Colombian state, that he was probably killed by a jealous lover, or his killing was justified because the UP "combined the forms of struggle" (00:28:58-00:28:09).[19]

Yet, whilst *Antígonas* displays the limits of legal institutions in protecting rights, it does not completely reject the human rights framework—Satizábal speaks about how the women victims featured in the play have become human rights defenders through their activism

("Memoria poetica" 251)—and the play's desire to highlight state violations and its exclusion of guerrilla abuses arguably connects it to a radical history of human rights in Colombia. As Winifred Tate has observed in her study of the evolution of the human rights movement in the country, to conclude that it can only serve a hegemonic agenda would be to erase how human rights, like transitional justice, "can be deployed to multiple ideological ends" (8). Complicating Moyn's hypothesis, Tate argues that the ideological roots of human rights in Colombia did not lie in the abandonment of utopian thinking. Instead, it emerged from "solidarity organizations rooted in radical leftist politics" (28), who significantly deployed the human rights framework "to explain and resolve a specific kind of Colombian violence: violence perpetrated by the state against the left" (73). Following on from Tate's work, Jorge González-Jácome has similarly explored how human rights in Colombia, like other parts of the Global South, emerged not out of the defeat of the left but co-existed within projects for radical social transformation ("The Emergence of Revolutionary" 92). He argues that in the 1970s the Colombian left, which had traditionally viewed law and individual rights as "instruments of the bourgeoisie and as a tool for capitalist consolidation" ("The Emergence of Human Rights" 295), began to see human rights as a tool to denounce increasing state repression ("The Emergence of Revolutionary" 102).

Marín Pineda argues that the play's fusion of two types of human rights abuses—the first being the violations of the rights of political militants, such as the human rights lawyer, UP activists and the student leader, and the second being the victims of extrajudicial executions who were not targeted for their political activism—reflects a shift away from a "revolutionary political agenda" and "forms of violence determined by confrontation" towards a "unidirectional violence" and "a commitment to the discourse and practice of human rights" (107).[20] I argue in contrast that the play does not move towards a more apolitical notion of

human rights but in fact draws upon this alternative human rights framework grounded in social struggle, which is often erased in human rights histories that concentrate on the development of international law (González-Jácome, "The Emergence of Human Rights" 297). Significantly, in the early 2010s it creates a vision of human rights more in line with their origins in the radical left in Colombia in the 1970s and early 1980s.[21] This is also conveyed through how the play's aesthetics very clearly evoke the iconography of the left in Latin America. In one powerful scene, the faces of prominent left-wing leaders who have been assassinated in the country are projected at fast pace onto the sheets at the back of the stage as the women move across the performance space. The Mothers of Soacha and UP survivors consistently hold up portraits of victims in a way that echoes the public protests of the movement of victims of state crimes in Colombia, and the iconic images used by H.I.J.O.S. and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to protest against state terror in the Southern Cone. Indeed, the play explicitly compares the violence in Colombia to state terror committed within the framework of Latin American dictatorships: at the end of the first scene, for example, the women collectively shout "¡Nunca jamás!" (Never Again!), the term calling up the title of one of the key transitional justice reports after the Argentinean dictatorship.

Furthermore, while the play appropriates the legal standards of human rights reporting—through its provision of specific details on individual events—it also very clearly rejects the depoliticized nature of human rights knowledge production (Tate 108). In one sense, this is enacted, as we have seen, through the play's refusal to see these as individual cases. Alongside the weaving of separate cases into a collective story, the idea of the collective is also evoked through how individual political and civil rights are related to collective social and economic ones. This is revealed at the end of *Antígonas* when, in her final speech, Antigone reveals the "threads" that link all these different stories of violence together:

> Every crime brought before this tribunal is woven into a bloody and horrific plan. I see the threads, the warp, I see the countryside without peasants … I see either barren, uninhabited lands, or immense palm oil plantations. (00:56:52-00:57:46).[22]

Unlike the classical version of the story, in which Antigone's defiance of the law against burying her brother Polynices leads to her suicide, in this version, Antigone does not die at the end of play. Instead, her act of mourning leads to an acknowledgement of the relationship between the sites of violence and displacement she names and the economic causes behind the conflict, in which mass land dispossession has paved the way for agro-industrial development. Violations of individual rights are thus explicitly connected to the development of agribusiness and foreign direct investment in natural resources (Rojas).

***Un relato conflictivo***

The link between human rights and social transformation is moreover articulated through the aesthetics and style of the play itself. *Antígonas* does not just have a pedagogical goal to teach the audience about human rights abuses perpetrated by state actors in Colombia, it also seeks to compel the public to act. As Nelsy López Plazas explains, the creation of a human rights tribunal in the play functions on two levels. On the one hand, the "women's tribunal" is the stage, where women victims can present evidence; on the other, the women convert the audience into the judge or jury of the crimes they exhibit and repeatedly call on the audience to make judgement (38). Satizábal states that the tribunal is "the audience: every spectator"[23] ("Memoria poética" 258) and in Antigone's final speech she implicates the audience: "They [the perpetrators] must come before you. You know who they are!"[24] The play thus repeatedly breaks the fourth wall to both name perpetrators and compel the audience to act.

The passivity of the spectators, sitting in silence in the dark theatre, is compared with the silence and complicity of the Colombian population in the face of such extreme human rights abuses. As Antigone expresses in one of her interventions: "I have heard and seen all of this but you, you [gesturing at the audience] no longer hear or see anything and for this reason I have come to this tribunal to ask you to speak out with me" (00:14:06-00:14:23).[25]

*Antígonas*' requirement that the audience become active, critical participants furthermore links to how the play's engagement with victims of the conflict draws upon a longer history of Colombian political theatre. The play is a production of *Tramaluna Teatro,* which forms part of the *Corporación Colombiana de Teatro* and is closely connected to the legendary experimental theatre company *Teatro La Candelaria* formed by Patricia Ariza and Santiago García in 1966. Like other influential Latin American theatre practitioners and collectives founded in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Enrique Buenaventura and the *Teatro Experimental de Cali* and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *La Candelaria* created a form of popular theatre that engaged directly with Colombia's social and political struggles. Emerging out of the country's radical student movement, in the context of the region's anti-capitalist and revolutionary upsurge, Colombia's vanguard theatre movement was heavily influenced by theories of political theatre deriving from the work of Bertoldt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski, amongst others, but also created a new theatrical language that responded to its own national context. In the case of Colombia, this was developed through the methodology of *creación colectiva* (collective creation). Eschewing the idea of a single author, the theatre was transformed into a laboratory of investigation where participants conduct research into issues deriving from local contexts and histories and then collectively develop this into a theatrical work that sought to play a role in social and political transformation (Jaramillo 92-98). For decades, the *Corporación Colombiana de Teatro* has deployed the method of

"collective creation" to work directly with sectors of the Colombian population who have been victimized by the armed conflict. This has resulted in a series of theatrical works as well as large-scale performances in the Colombian public sphere. In fact, *Antígonas* developed out of the 2009 action "Mujeres en la plaza: memoria de la ausencia: dónde están" (Women in the square: memory of absence: where are they?) in which three hundred women human rights activists, including the Mothers of Soacha and survivors of the UP, deployed dance, music and embodied action to transform the Plaza de Bolívar in central Bogotá into a space of memory and collective mourning.

Although the aim of this occupation of public space is, on the one hand, to bring trauma and pain "into consciousness, into the shared repertoire of cultural experience, into existence" (Taylor, "DNA of Performance" 53), as Satizábal states, such performances also "challenge the everyday use of these public spaces and make visible the country's social, cultural and political conflicts, as well as those excluded from power" ("Patricia Ariza" 18).[26] This returns us to the aims of documentary theatre, which actively seeks to involve the public and "evoke a public sphere where a gathered group might investigate and consider the meaning of individual experiences in the context of state or societal responsibilities or norms" (Reinelt 11). Indeed, for the audience empathy with the stories included in *Antígonas* is also balanced with how the play compels spectators to engage in a kind of critical or Brechtian distancing. Alongside breaking the fourth wall this is enacted through the play's disassociated, non-linear style with its multiple Antigones and juxtaposition between the representation of the classical story and the presentation of testimony. In this way the play adapts the presentational style of Epic Theatre, where the audience is refused emotional catharsis and required to both make sense of the play and engage critically with its socio-political context (Martin and Bial 2-3). It however takes this further with its incorporation of non-actors who have suffered the socio-

political issues displayed and its repeated presentation of these circumstances to the audience; for Satizábal, "The actors *represent*. The women activists *present*" ("Memoria poética" 252).[27]

Following on from this, while the human rights narrative constructed by the play could suggest a rather prescriptive or Manichean view of the Colombian conflict, in fact the play does not simply reinforce an objective representation of the war but seeks to "situate historical truth as an embattled site of contestation" (Forsyth and Megson 3). For Satizábal, the aim was to create a piece of drama that would not only be "a resource for political struggle, but would also be an artistic investigation into collective life" (interview).[28] Significantly, he argues that this can only be conveyed through creative methodologies that give space to a polyphonic narrative: "A story in which polyphony does not represent silence or the fabrication of events but is poetic, musical, novelistic, cinematographic, theatrical, pictorial, performative and conflictive. Above all, conflictive" ("Conflicto y arte" 45).[29] This element of conflict, as this chapter has shown, is explicitly related to the transitional justice context in which the play originated. *Antígonas* intervenes in this field not by calling for an uncritical version of peace and reconciliation. In response to the suppression of state responsibility and the erasure of victims of state crimes in official transitional justice and memory mechanisms, the play constructs a grassroots memory initiative that dramatizes how both human rights and transitional justice are not simply "moral, legal or political entities" but are "representations of human relations that emerge from struggle" (Roberts x). Thus, through a "theatre of presence, repetition, and multiplication" (Fradinger 560), in which the human rights narratives of often silenced victims are repeated, echoed and multiplied, *Antígonas* refuses to accept only one version of human rights or transitional justice.

Importantly, it makes visible an alternative to the state-led vision of transitional justice, which creates space for the ongoing possibility of social transformation.

**Works Cited**


A'ness, Francine. "Resisting Amnesia: Yuyachkani, Performance, and the Postwar Reconstruction of Peru." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2004, pp. 395–414. doi:10.1353/tj.2004.0083.

Anrup, Roland. *Antígona y Creonte. Rebeldía y estado en Colombia*. Ediciones B, 2011.

Becker, Florian, Paola S. Hernández, and Brenda Werth, eds. *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First-Century Theater. Global Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Bickford, Louis. "Unofficial Truth Projects." *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2007, pp. 994–1035. www.jstor.org/stable/20072834.

Brown, Wendy. "'The Most We Can Hope For. . . ': Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, no. 2-3, 2004, pp. 451–63. doi.org/10.1215/00382876-103-2-3-451.

Carrillo, Vladimir, and Tom Kucharz, eds. *Colombia: terrorismo de estado. Testimonios de la guerra sucia contra los movimientos populares*. Icaria, 2006.

Castillejo-Cuéllar, Alejandro. *La ilusión de la justicia transicional: perspectivas críticas desde el sur global*. Universidad de los Andes, 2017.

Cepeda Castro, Iván, and Claudia Girón Ortiz. "La "guerra sucia" contra los opositores políticos en Colombia." *Colombia: terrorismo de estado. Testimonios de la guerra sucia contra los movimientos populares*, edited by Vladimir Carrillo and Tom Kucharz, Icaria, 2006, pp. 147-72.

Chambers, Paul. 2017. “Resisting Neoliberalism in Colombia: The Role of Human Rights.” *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2017, pp. 127-144. doi.org/10.1177/0094582X17699914

Cohen, Cynthia, Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, and Polly O. Walker, eds. *Acting Together I: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict: Resistance and Reconciliation in Regions of Violence*. New Village Press, 2011.

Cole, Catherine M. “Performance, Transitional Justice, and the Law: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2007, pp.167–87. doi.org/10.1353/tj.2007.0087.

Díaz, Catalina. “Challenging Impunity from Below: The Contested Ownership of Transitional Justice in Colombia.” *Transitional Justice from Below*, edited by Kieran McEvoy and Lorna McGregor. Hart Publishing, 2008, pp. 189-216.

Forsyth, Alison, and Chris Megson. “Introduction.” *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 1-5.

Fradinger, Moira. “Making Women Visible: Multiple Antigones on the Colombian Twenty-First-Century Stage.” *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, edited by Kathryn Bosher et al. Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 556-575.

Franco, Jean. “Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private.” *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, edited by George Yúdice and Jean Franco. University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 65-83.

Gill, Lesley. *A Century of Violence in a Red City: Popular Struggle, Counterinsurgency, and Human Rights in Colombia*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Giraldo, Javier. *Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy*. Common Courage Press, 1996.

González-Jácome, Jorge. “The Emergence of Revolutionary and Democratic Human Rights Activism in Colombia Between 1974 and 1980.” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2018, pp. 91–118. doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2018.0003.

---. “The Emergence of Human Rights in Colombia: Revolutionary Promise or Survival Strategy?” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2019, pp. 287–98. doi.org/10.1353/hum.2019.0011.

de Greiff Pablo. “On Making the Invisible Visible.” *Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society: Beyond Outreach*, edited by Clara Ramírez-Barat. Social Science Research Council, 2014, pp. 11-26.

Jaramillo, María Mercedes. *El Nuevo Teatro colombiano: arte y política*. Universidad de Antioquia, 1992.

Lane, Jill. “Foreword: Postnational Theater Studies.” *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First-Century Theater. Global Perspectives*, edited by Florian Becker, Paola S. Hernández, and Brenda Werth. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. ix-xii.

Laplante, Lisa J., and Kimberly Theidon. “Transitional Justice in Times of Conflict: Colombia’s Ley de Justicia y Paz.” *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 28, issue 1, 2006, pp. 49-108.

Lazzara, Michael. “The Memory Turn.” *New Approaches to Latin American Studies. Culture and Power*, edited by Juan Poblete. Routledge, 2018, pp. 14-31.

López Plazas, Nelsy Cristina. “La justicia en la narración: el caso de *Antígonas Tribunal de Mujeres*.” *Revista de Estudios Colombianos*, no. 52, 2018, pp. 37-46.

Marín Pineda, Alejandra. "¿Derechos humanos o renuncia a la reparación humanitaria? Compromisos políticos del teatro colombiano en dos obras sobre los 'falsos positivos'." *Latin American Theatre Review*, vol. 52 no. 1, 2018, p. 101-124. doi:10.1353/ltr.2018.0027.

Martin, Carol. "Bodies of Evidence." *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2006, pp. 8–15. doi.org/10.1162/dram.2006.50.3.8.

Martin, Carol, and Henry Bial. "Introduction." *Brecht Sourcebook*, edited by Carol Martin and Henry Bial. Routledge, 2000, pp. 1-10.

McEvoy Kieran, and Lorna McGregor. "Transitional Justice from Below: An Agenda for Research, Policy and Praxis." *Transitional Justice from Below*, edited by Kieran McEvoy and Lorna McGregor. Hart Publishing, 2008, pp. 1-14.

Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

Ramírez, María Clemencia. "Maintaining Democracy in Colombia through Political Exclusion, States of Exception, Counterinsurgency, and Dirty War." *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, edited by Enrique Arias and Daniel Goldstein. Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 84-107.

Ramírez-Barat, Clara. "Transitional Justice and the Public Sphere." *Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society: Beyond Outreach*, edited by Clara Ramírez-Barat. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2014, pp. 27-48.

Raphael, Sam. "Paramilitarism and State Terror in Colombia." *Contemporary State Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, edited by Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy, and Scott Poynting. Routledge, 2009, pp. 163-180.

Reátegui Carrillo, Félix. “Las víctimas recuerdan. Notas sobre la práctica social de la memoria.” *Recordar en conflicto: iniciativas no oficiales de memoria en Colombia*, edited by Marcela Briceño-Donn et al. International Centre for Transitional Justice, 2009, pp. 17-39.

Reinelt, Janelle. “The Promise of Documentary.” *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 6-23.

Riaño, Pilar, and María Victoria Uribe. “Construyendo memoria en medio del conflicto: el Grupo de Memoria Histórica de Colombia.” *Revista de Estudios Colombianos*, no. 50, 2017, pp. 9-23.

Roberts, Christopher N.J. *The Contentious History of the International Bill of Human Rights*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Rojas, Cristina. “Securing the State and Developing Social Insecurities: The Securitisation of Citizenship in Contemporary Colombia.” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2009, pp. 227-45. doi.org/10.1080/01436590802622631.

Rowen, Jamie. “‘We Don’t Believe in Transitional Justice:’ Peace and the Politics of Legal Ideas in Colombia.” *Law & Social Inquiry*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2017, pp. 622–47. doi.org/10.1111/lsi.12262.

---. *Searching for Truth in the Transitional Justice Movement*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Sánchez-Blake, Elvira, and Yenifer Luna Gómez. “Camino a la paz: repertorios simbólicos testimoniales de una nación en transición.” *Kamchatka. Revista de análisis cultural*, vol. 0, no. 6, 2015, pp. 941–57. doi.org/10.7203/KAM.6.7279.

Satizábal, Carlos, dir. *Antígonas, tribunal de mujeres*. *Youtube*, uploaded by Suacha en Imágenes, November 2, 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPR5UC17At0.

---. “Memoria poética y conflicto en Colombia—a propósito de *Antígonas Tribunal de Mujeres*, de Tramaluna Teatro–.” *Revista Colombiana de las Artes Escénicas*, vol. 9, 2015, pp. 250-268.

---. “Patricia Ariza: sus acciones poético políticas.” *Performances: habitar la calle, habitar los cuerpos*, edited by Patricia Ariza, Carlos Satizábal and Liliana Alzate. Corporación Colombiana de Teatro: Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia: Instituto Distrital de las Artes, 2015, pp. 9-26.

---. “Conflicto y arte en Colombia: entre la ficción engañosa y la poesía.” *Huellas: revista de la Universidad del Norte*, no. 101, 2017, pp. 34–46.

---. Personal interview. 28 June 2018.

Speed, Shannon, and María Teresa Sierra. “Introduction.” *Critical Perspectives on Human Rights and Multiculturalism in Neoliberal Latin America*, special issue of *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1-9. www.jstor.org/stable/24497679.

Tate, Winifred. *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia*. University of California Press, 2007.

Taylor, Diana. *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”*. Duke University Press, 1997.

---. “DNA of Performance: Political Hauntology.” *Cultural Agency in the Americas*, edited by Doris Sommer, 52-81. Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 52-81.

---. “Trauma and Performance: Lessons from Latin America.” *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 5, 2006, pp. 1674–77. www.jstor.org/stable/25501645.

Theidon, Kimberly. “Editorial Note.” *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 3, issue 3, 209, pp. 295–300. doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijp022.

United Nations Security Council, "The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies," 23 August 2004. https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/2004%20report.pdf. Accessed 19 Nov. 2020.

Uprimny, Rodrigo. "Introducción." *¿Justicia transicional sin transición? Verdad, justicia y reparación para Colombia*, edited by Rodrigo Uprimny Yepes et al. Ediciones Antropos, 2006, pp. 13-16.

Uprimny, Rodrigo and María Paula Saffon. "Usos y abusos de la justicia transicional en Colombia." *Anuario de Derechos Humanos*, no. 4, 2008, pp. 165-195. doi:10.5354/0718-2279.2011.13511.

Zunino, Marco. *Justice Framed: A Genealogy of Transitional Justice*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.

[1] "Soy Antígona, la desterrada de las ciudades. Vengo de las matanzas de Bahía Portete, de Macayepo, de Mapiripán, de San José, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, de Chinú, de Chinulito, del Salado, del Salado, del Salado, de Puerto Bello, de Puerto Clavel, de Buenaventura, de Buenaventura, de Buenaventura, del Aro, de Sopetrán, de Suárez, de Morales, de Segovia, de Segovia, de Segovia, de Catatumbo." All citations of the play in this chapter come from the online recording by Suacha en Imágenes, uploaded on November 2, 2014. All translations into English are my own.

[2] "Antígona no está muerta, está viva, está viva en ellas, ellas son las mujeres que hacen la resistencia y son unas Antígonas que están buscando la verdad."

[3] "un esfuerzo por procurar la no repetición de los hechos victimizantes y por la preservación de la memoria histórica."

[4] "Buenas tardes, señoras y señores. Estoy en este tribunal de mujeres, vengo a protestar, vengo a reclamar, vengo a denunciar."

[5] "Señor juez, mi nombre es Lucero Carmona, soy una de las Madres de Soacha y madre de Omar Leonardo Triana Carmona, mi único hijo que fue asesinado por el Ejército Nacional en la vereda del Monteloro en el municipio de Barbosa, Antioquia el 15 de agosto de 2007."

[6] "el cuerpo de las mujeres es el gran soporte de la acción viva: el cuerpo femenino que canta, que actúa, que habla, que enmudece, que está presente."

[7] "buscan la restitución poética y simbólica de sus irreparables vidas pérdidas."

[8] See for example the Justice and Peace Law's creation of the *Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación* (National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation), which incorporated the *Grupo de Memoria Histórica* (Historical Memory Group, GMH), an investigative entity tasked with producing a series of reports on the conflict in line with victims' right to truth (Riaño and Uribe 10). With the passing of the Victims' Law in 2011 the truth-seeking functions of the GMH were passed over to the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* (National Centre for Historical Memory). The FARC peace process established a Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice,

Reparation and Non-repetition, including a Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a truth commission amongst other reparations measures.

[9] However, in 2018 *Antígonas* was performed as part of the *Cumbre nacional arte y cultura por la paz, la reconciliación y la convivencia* (National Summit of Art and Culture for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence), organised by the *Corporación Colombiana de Teatro* alongside the Ministry of Culture. Satizábal has also said that the CCT has a close working relationship with the truth commission formed by the FARC peace process (interview).

[10] "mandato de Uribe [cuando] fueron más de 5,000 ejecuciones extrajudiciales."

[11] "el colectivo fue perseguido por el D.A.S. El D.A.S. era la policía política del gobierno, sus agentes recopilaron información de la vida pública y privada de Soraya."

[12] "nos hicieron un montaje. Éramos muchos y muchas estudiantes de las universidades públicas del caribe colombiano."

[13] "los soldados simularon un combate, asesinaron a la familia de Fanny y dijeron que habían caído en combate."

[14] "una lucha entre terroristas narcotraficantes y un Estado legítimamente constituido."

[15] "Aquí el terrorismo de Estado no existe, este es un país democrático."

[16] "distintos actores con intereses distintos e incluso opuestos."

[17] "Nos tienen de juzgado en juzgado, de papel en papel, pero aquí no ha pasado nada."

[18] "¿Me van a hacer las mismas preguntas de hace veintisiete años?"

[19] "combinó las formas de lucha."

[20] De una "agenda política revolucionaria" y "una violencia marcada por la confrontación" a "una violencia unidireccional" y "un compromiso con el discurso y la práctica de los derechos humanos."

[21] Tate argues that it is not until the late 1980s and 1990s, with the professionalisation of the human rights movement in Colombia, that activists began to depoliticize their language and "weaken their critique of the state" (153). This also relates to the debate in Colombia over human rights and international humanitarian law. As Tate states, by the 1990s professional human rights organisations denounced political violence by all armed actors. For activists with roots in the radical left, "only states should be held accountable for human rights violations" and "adopting international humanitarian law to criticize the guerrillas would simply fuel the government's campaign to deflect accountability for political violence" (163).

[22] "Cada crimen que ha llegado a este tribunal está tejido en un plan de sangre y horror. Veo los hilos, veo la urdimbre, veo los campos sin campesinos … veo tierras yermas, desiertas, o cargadas de inmensas plantaciones de palma de aceite."

[23] "el público mismo: cada espectadora, cada espectador."

[24] "Qué vengan aquí a presentarse ante ustedes. ¡Ustedes les conocen!"

[25] "He oído y visto todo esto pero ustedes, ustedes [gesturing at the audience] ya no oyen ni ven nada y por esto es que he venido a este tribunal a pedirles que griten conmigo."

[26] "intervienen el uso habitual de estos espacios para instalar en ellos los grandes conflictos sociales, culturales y políticos del país desde las presencias invisibilizadas por el poder."

[27] "Las actrices representan. Las mujeres presentan."

[28] "un recurso para la lucha política, sino que también es una investigación artística sobre la vida colectiva."

[29] "Un relato donde la polifonía no sea de silenciamientos o falsificaciones de hechos sino, poesía, musical, novelística, cinematográfica, teatral, dancística, pictórica, performática y conflictiva. Sobre todo, conflictiva."